

enhancement of human rights. In many instances, the defense of these values by the United States and its allies has ushered in important changes in the human condition.

Yet today this “rules-based” system faces challenges. The frequent exhortations for countries to “do their fair share,” play by “twenty-first-century rules,” or be “responsible stakeholders” in a common system reflect the fact that there is no shared definition of the system or understanding of what a “fair” contribution would be. Outside the Western world, regions that have played a minimal role in these rules’ original formulation question their validity in their present form and have made clear that they would work to modify them. Thus while “the international community” is invoked perhaps more insistently now than in any other era, it presents no clear or agreed set of goals, methods, or limits.

Our age is insistently, at times almost desperately, in pursuit of a concept of world order. Chaos threatens side by side with unprecedented interdependence: in the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the disintegration of states, the impact of environmental depredations, the persistence of genocidal practices, and the spread of new technologies threatening to drive conflict beyond human control or comprehension. New methods of accessing and communicating information unite regions as never before and project events globally—but in a manner that inhibits reflection, demanding of leaders that they register instantaneous reactions in a form expressible in slogans. Are we facing a period in which forces beyond the restraints of any order determine the future?

Varieties of World Order

No truly global “world order” has ever existed. What passes for order in our time was devised in Western Europe nearly four centuries

Shortly after, in 1519, he prevailed in the election for the post of Holy Roman Emperor, making him Charlemagne's formal successor. The coincidence of these titles meant that the medieval vision seemed poised to be fulfilled. A single, pious ruler now governed territories approximately equivalent to today's Austria, Germany, northern Italy, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, eastern France, Belgium, Netherlands, Spain, and much of the Americas. (This massive agglomeration of political power was accomplished almost entirely through strategic marriages and gave rise to the Habsburg saying "Bella gerant alii; tu, felix Austria, nube!"—"Leave the waging of wars to others; you, happy Austria, marry!") Spanish explorers and conquistadores—Magellan and Cortés sailed under Charles's auspices—were in the process of destroying the ancient empires of the Americas and carrying the sacraments together with European political power across the New World. Charles's armies and navies were engaged in the defense of Christendom against a new wave of invasions, by the Ottoman Turks and their surrogates in southeastern Europe and North Africa. Charles personally led a counterattack in Tunisia, with a fleet funded by gold from the New World. Caught up in these heady developments, Charles was hailed by his contemporaries as the "greatest emperor since the division of the empire in 843," destined to return the world to "a single shepherd."

In the tradition of Charlemagne, at his coronation Charles vowed to be "the protector and defender of the Holy Roman Church," and crowds paid him obeisance as "Caesare" and "Imperio"; Pope Clement affirmed Charles as the temporal force for "seeing peace and order reestablished" in Christendom.

A Chinese or Turkish visitor to Europe at that time might well have perceived a seemingly familiar political system: a continent presided over by a single dynasty imbued with a sense of divine mandate. If Charles had been able to consolidate his authority and manage an orderly succession in the vast Habsburg territorial conglomerate,

Europe would have been shaped by a dominant central authority like the Chinese Empire or the Islamic caliphate.

It did not happen; nor did Charles try. In the end, he was satisfied to base order on equilibrium. Hegemony might be his inheritance but not his objective, as he proved when, after capturing his temporal political rival the French King Francis I in the Battle of Pavia in 1525, he released him—freeing France to resume a separate and adversarial foreign policy at the heart of Europe. The French King repudiated Charles's grand gesture by taking the remarkable step—so at odds with the medieval concept of Christian statecraft—of proposing military cooperation to the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman, who was then invading Eastern Europe and challenging Habsburg power from the east.

The universality of the Church Charles sought to vindicate was not to be had. He proved unable to prevent the new doctrine of Protestantism from spreading through the lands that were the principal base of his power. Both religious and political unity were fracturing. The effort to fulfill his aspirations inherent in his office was beyond the capabilities of a single individual. A haunting portrait by Titian from 1548 at Munich's Alte Pinakothek reveals the torment of an eminence who cannot reach spiritual fulfillment or manipulate the, to him, ultimately secondary levers of hegemonic rule. Charles resolved to abdicate his dynastic titles and divide his vast empire, and did so in a manner reflecting the pluralism that had defeated his quest for unity. To his son Philip, he bequeathed the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, then the crown of Spain and its global empire. In an emotional 1555 ceremony in Brussels, he reviewed the record of his reign, attested to the diligence with which he had fulfilled his duties, and in the process handed the States-General of the Netherlands to Philip as well. The same year, Charles concluded a landmark treaty, the Peace of Augsburg, which recognized Protestantism within the Holy Roman Empire. Abandoning the spiritual foundation of his empire, Charles

afforded princes the right to choose the confessional orientation of their territory. Shortly afterward, he resigned his title as Holy Roman Emperor, passing responsibility for the empire, its upheavals, and its external challenges to his brother Ferdinand. Charles retired to a monastery in a rural region of Spain, to a life of seclusion. He spent his last days in the company of his confessor and of an Italian clock maker, whose works lined the walls and whose trade Charles attempted to learn. When Charles died in 1558, his will expressed regret for the fracturing of doctrine that had taken place during his reign and charged his son to redouble the Inquisition.

Three events completed the disintegration of the old ideal of unity. By the time Charles V died, revolutionary changes had raised Europe's sights from a regional to a global enterprise while fragmenting the medieval political and religious order: the beginning of the age of discovery, the invention of printing, and the schism in the Church.

A map depicting the universe, as comprehended by educated Europeans in the medieval age, would have shown Northern and Southern Hemispheres stretching from India in the east to Iberia and the islands of Britain in the west, with Jerusalem in the center. In the medieval perception, this was not a map for travelers but a stage divinely ordained for the drama of human redemption. The world, it was believed on biblical authority, was six-sevenths land and one-seventh water. Because the principles of salvation were fixed and could be cultivated through efforts in the lands known to Christendom, there was no reward for venturing past the fringes of civilization. In the *Inferno*, Dante described Ulysses' sailing out through the Pillars of Hercules (the Rock of Gibraltar and the adjacent heights of North Africa, at the western edge of the Mediterranean Sea) in search of knowledge, and being punished for his transgression against God's plan by a whirlwind that dooms his ship and all its crew.

The modern era announced itself when enterprising societies sought glory and wealth by exploring the oceans and whatever lay

course, also a maxim justifying conquest and conversion. Europeans were enabled to increase their wealth and salve their consciences simultaneously. Their global competition for territorial control changed the nature of international order. Europe's perspective expanded—until successive colonial efforts by various European states covered most of the globe and concepts of world order merged with the operation of the balance of power in Europe.

The second seminal event was the invention of movable-type printing in the middle of the fifteenth century, which made it possible to share knowledge on a hitherto-unimaginable scale. Medieval society had stored knowledge by memorizing or laboriously hand-copying religious texts or by understanding history through epic poetry. In the age of exploration, what was being discovered needed to be understood, and printing permitted accounts to be disseminated. The exploration of new worlds inspired as well a quest to rediscover the ancient world and its verities, with special emphasis on the centrality of the individual. The growing embrace of reason as an objective force of illumination and explication began to shake existing institutions, including the hitherto-unassailable Catholic Church.

The third revolutionary upheaval, that of the Protestant Reformation, was initiated when Martin Luther posted ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church in 1517, insisting on the individual's direct relationship with God; hence individual conscience—not established orthodoxy—was put forward as the key to salvation. A number of feudal rulers seized the opportunity to enhance their authority by embracing Protestantism, imposing it on their populations, and enriching themselves by seizing Church lands. Each side regarded the other as heretical, and disagreements turned into life-or-death struggles as political and sectarian disputes commingled. The barrier separating domestic and foreign disputes collapsed as sovereigns backed rival factions in their neighbors' domestic, often bloody,

religious struggles. The Protestant Reformation destroyed the concept of a world order sustained by the “two swords” of papacy and empire. Christianity was split and at war with itself.

The Thirty Years' War: What Is Legitimacy?

A century of intermittent wars attended the rise and spread of the Protestant critique of Church supremacy: the Habsburg Empire and the papacy both sought to stamp out the challenge to their authority, and Protestants resisted in defense of their new faith.

The period labeled by posterity as the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) brought this turmoil to a climax. With an imperial succession looming and the Catholic King of Bohemia, the Habsburg Ferdinand, emerging as the most plausible candidate, the Protestant Bohemian nobility attempted an act of “regime change,” offering their crown—and its decisive electoral vote—to a Protestant German prince, an outcome in which the Holy Roman Empire would have ceased to be a Catholic institution. Imperial forces moved to crush the Bohemian rebellion and then pressed their advantage against Protestantism generally, triggering a war that devastated Central Europe. (The Protestant princes were generally located in the north of Germany, including the then relatively insignificant Prussia; the Catholic heartland was the south of Germany and Austria.)

In theory, the Emperor's fellow Catholic sovereigns were obliged to unite in opposition to the new heresies. Yet faced with a choice between spiritual unity and strategic advantage, more than a few chose the latter. Foremost among them was France.

In a period of general upheaval, a country that maintains domestic authority is in a position to exploit chaos in neighboring states for larger international objectives. A cadre of sophisticated and ruthless French ministers saw their opportunity and moved decisively. The Kingdom of France began the process by giving itself a new governance. In feu-